

life and motive into those we were accustomed to take before. We believe that nothing short of the impulsive power of a new affection will accomplish this. We shall succeed only when we do it to Him who loved us and gave himself for us. But when we are led to set such an aim before us, every office becomes exalted; the glorious end is made to sanctify every lawful means employed to further it; the meanest work is ennobled by being made part of the service which we owe to God; the poor man is raised to the same rank as the rich man, and the servant is as high as his master. Such a motive power will make us insensible to all the ordinary trials and temptations of life, just as the Roman army, when eagerly engaged in battle with the enemies of their country, were unconscious of an earthquake which made the ground to tremble beneath their feet.

But it may be proper, before leaving this subject, to add, that besides the specific question, What is a virtuous act? there is a more general question, into which the other resolves itself, What constitutes a virtuous agent? The answer is, An agent in whom the moral faculty or law has its proper place and power, ruling over all, and subordinating the will as the active principle. The human mind is a unity, and it is impossible to separate the acts, in regard to their responsibility, from the agent who performs them. It is not the act which must bear the responsibility, but the agent who does the act. God judges not so much the acts as the agent in the acts. When the actor is not in a right state—when his will is not in subjection to the law appointed to rule it—it is not possible that he can be virtuous. The conscience will not justify him, and we may conclude that the God in whose name the conscience speaks will condemn him.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that an agent in a morally right state, and no other, can perform a

morally right
action. It is not enough to consider the isolated
act, we must
consider likewise the agent in the act, before we
can pronounce
it to be either virtuous or vicious. We hold this
principle to
be one of vast moment, both in ethics and
theology, and we
may return to the consideration of it when we
come to consider
the existing moral state of man.